

JUNE 14, 1984

It looks like the only way to officially end the winter of '83 or '84 is to prevail upon the Governor to issue a proclamation ordering the seasons to Change in Texas. Cold weather stopped in April, but the feed wagons kept on running like it was January or February.

May was so dry in the Shortgrass Country that woodpeckers stopped pecking holes in utility poles. The creosoted wood was so dried out that the birds were afraid the grain would splinter and put out their eyes before a decent hole was drilled.

One of the many things that was worrying me was the way I kept doing the things I'd sworn I wasn't going to ever do again. Like I kept holding back and not selling out week after dry week followed by day after cloudless day. Knowing all the time if I didn't get rid of more cattle, the entire trust network of the Greater Boston banking community wasn't going to be able to raise the cash it'd take to pay my feed bills.

But on I went. making excuses like I was waiting for the market to stabilize or stalling for the auction runs to grow smaller. I thought of asking my Mother whether she was holding back some secret from my childhood. Along in the '30s, Mertzon fielded a number of excellent rock throwers, old boys who could rapid fire rocks with unfailing accuracy. I don't remember taking up fractions in the third grade, but I recall vividly the rock fights that took place after school was out.

I might possibly have taken a blow to the head that was so severe that I blacked out. Judges, I've heard, disallow non compos mentis pleas in their courtrooms for ranchers. High magistrates look on that sort of deficiency in herders as being a normal characteristic of the trade. So I suppose unless my Mother would be willing to defend me, I couldn't ask for mercy in court.

It's not completely unreal to continue to keep cattle on the range. Now it's absolutely without economic justification to pasture cattle in our area. But as far as these 200 or so pound calves are concerned, they'll hold their weight another six months whether it rains or not.

I've been reading that after the cold winter, some feeders are going to go back to buying the British breeds over the humpies. One of the buyers on the panel I was reading about said that hair in their ears was a good sign that a calf would grow a winter coat.

He'd sure like our calves right now. They not only have lots of hair in their ears, they have goatee beards several inches long and every strand of hair they grew last winter. These drouth calves will work anywhere in any climate except a wet one. There's no way of pulling them too green this year. Most of them were weaned without having over about four full swallows of milk. I doubt if there are eight head of calves from San Angelo to El Paso that'd miss their mothers longer than 20 minutes after they were formally weaned.

I've grown partial to the little hairy rascals. When 20 or 30 head of puffy, pot-bellied calves hit the ring, I like to rear back and tell our guests those are native Texas cattle raised right there in the Shortgrass Country. I don't see anything so special about a slick fat calf that's going to have to be fed out anyway. Under fluorescent lights, I think those big bellied calves look as good as anybody's cattle.

Every week, we ship a trailer load from one place and lighten up with a gooseneck load from another one. Water and salt and air are having to go a long ways. I need to check on my past. It could be that I am carrying a bigger disability than anyone thinks.